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ABSTRACT

The Dade County (Florida) Public School System is replacing its Teacher Assessment and Development System (TADS), initiated in 1982, with systems that draw on recent research, link teaching skills to school improvement, and recognize and reward advanced pedagogy. The comprehensive approach will integrate subordinate and peer assessment through a dual focus on teaching and administrative contributions to school improvement. Independent of the TADS monitoring system, a Peer Intervention and Assessment Program (PIAP) is to be piloted in 1992-93. This formative and collaborative approach is, of necessity, linked to the summative realities of evaluation. The TADS was a ground-level instrument to assess teacher performance in the classroom. The refinements that are proposed must: (1) assess performance above the minimum level; (2) relate performance behaviors to the teaching of thinking skills and the use of higher order questions; (3) use current research and data on effective practice; and (4) assess advanced pedagogical techniques. The diversity of student clients and the contributions of educational professionals compel the use of multiple assessment systems. School improvement must be the forum within which instructional and administrative contributions are measured. (SLD)

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DISTRICT-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE ON INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL: INTEGRATION AND REFINEMENT

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DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation in 1982 of the Teacher Assessment and Development System (TADS), the Dade County Public Schools has mirrored the nationally evolving experience with the refinement of performance appraisal. Over the course of ten years, some half million performance observations have enabled a focus on measurable school improvement and a concurrent move toward participatory management.

Alignment of performance appraisal and school improvement in an atmosphere of participatory management, while not an identified target objective of the implementation of TADS, has nonetheless been a major effect. Drawing from this experience, the Dade County Public Schools has initiated actions to replace TADS with systems that draw from recent research, link individual teaching skills to school improvement plans, and recognize and reward advanced pedagogy.

A comprehensive approach will integrate subordinate and peer assessment through a dual focus on both teaching and administrative contributions to school improvement. These contributions represent a broad expansion of the required teaching behaviors on which TADS is based, and center more on professional responsibilities and those teaching behaviors (both required and auxiliary) within which creative thinking is recognized.

HISTORY

The formative nature of performance assessment was exemplified by the management/labor collaboration in the development of TADS and its pilot implementation in 1982. Throughout the research and development phase, the joint focus was on the professionalism of the instructional staff. In both the 1982-83 pilot and the 1983-84 field test years the labor/management working harmony emphasized the joint commitment to the formative dimension of performance assessment.

All orientation sessions in the pilot and field test years were jointly presented. Joint presentations continue to be provided at the twice-annual orientation for new teachers. Refinements in the initial system, as identified through the pilot and field test experiences, were jointly presented.

Training was provided for both administrators and teacher union stewards. The exactness of the training supports the joint commitment.

PROFICIENCY AND MONITORING

Proficiency updates, expressly designed to prevent "coder drift," were never implemented, primarily due to budget constraints. Instead, special proficiency updates concentrated on specific dimensions of TADS which were shown to require ongoing emphasis, interpretation, and training. These included such areas as lesson closure, identification of specifics of observed

deficiencies, timeliness of prescriptive assistance, the role of homework.

The joint commitment for orientation and training was noticeably absent from the proficiency updates, also for budgetary reasons rather than design. While this was not indicative of a lessening of the joint commitment, it had the same effect. Several major problems arose as a result of this practice:

1. inconsistency arose in the post-training interpretations;
2. significant increases occurred in disputed practices;
3. "coder drift" increased.

The fix for this experience was the use of a program monitoring model implemented immediately after the first full year of district-wide experience with TADS.

The TADS Program Monitoring Model consisted of four basic components:

1. role specifications of key personnel
2. monitoring activities of labor and management
3. implementation reviews
4. timelines for monitoring activities.

Consistency in interpretations and applications was addressed, in part, through joint observations by principals and assistant principals of lessons by volunteer teachers, enabling comparison of observation data and discussion of rationales for

ratings of acceptable and unacceptable teaching performances. (Data were not aggregated into formal assessment records for summative purposes).

In conjunction with the other monitoring components, the consistency checks should have indicated elements of coder drift. It is likely that this would have occurred if the program monitoring model had been retained; however, the sheer involvement in time and effort contributed to an alternative process which replaced the highly structured TADS Program Monitoring Model: the TADS Monitoring Committee.

By design, rather than concentrating on the original monitoring components, the TADS Monitoring Committee serves "as a forum for attempting resolution of observation/evaluation issues prior to the filing of a grievance."

Rather than an alternate means of assuring consistency in the implementation of TADS, the TADS Monitoring Committee was actually part of an alternative to the formal grievance process at two of the three levels before binding arbitration. While it formally retained the authority to conduct visits, (an action that was part of the original monitoring process), even the site visits were defined as "for the purpose of resolving disputes and monitoring and enhancing TADS implementation."

In 1987-88, the fourth year of full district implementation of TADS, the highly structured process of monitoring consistency

gave rise to an even greater structure of dispute resolution. The hope was for identification of system-wide issues of consistency through joint resolution of disputes. This hope was flawed in its very concept, and contributed to the very inconsistency it was designed, in part, to address.

PEER ASSESSMENT

To the extent that involvement of individuals in setting the standards for their own performance is one touchstone of professionalism, focus on the professionalization of teaching generated, independent of the TADS monitoring process, a negotiated agreement to pilot a peer intervention and assistance program in the Dade County Public Schools in 1992-93, subject to availability of funding.

Many of the components of the Peer Intervention and Assessment Program (PIAP) were drawn from at least two years of experience at selected schools having implemented school based management/shared decision making programs, within which variations of peer assessment were operational. A joint labor/management committee organized to oversee those initial experiences with peer assessment met only once and generated no formal reports. That committee did not meet with, share data with, or interact with the TADS Monitoring Committee.

A joint labor/management committee was established for the express purpose of assuring orderly and equitable implementation

of PIAP, and recommending any additional guidelines and definitions as may be necessary. The only linkage with TADS was in the mandatory TADS training for consulting teachers; this supplemented training in a variety of peer intervention and assistance strategies.

FORMATIVE GROWTH

Implementation of peer observation models through shared decision-making and school-based management serves to illustrate the formative and collaborative dimensions, even where these dimensions have evolved in parallel. The extensive experience over a ten-year period has shown that the most effective instructional assistance provided to raise competencies to acceptable standards is quality time with a master teacher. Both assistance reviews and external reviews corroborate the teaching skills needed, while the attainment of those skills most frequently occurs through the direct assistance of a master teacher.

In Florida, a teaching certificate is initially earned through satisfaction of requirements of a Professional Orientation Program, for which the peer teacher and the professional development plan are intrinsic to the growth and development of new and lesser experienced teachers, and to veteran teachers who need to strengthen certain skills.

Personal orientation to all criteria and procedures of the assessment system allows for that valuable focus on instructional skills and expectations. This focus is particularly critical to principals, as instructional leaders, as time constraints and non-teaching issues otherwise divert their attention away from the primary teaching and learning mission. Teachers know, immediately and conclusively, the shared commitment to quality instruction.

SUMMATIVE REALITY

No matter how formative, in concept and practice, assessment is linked to summative realities. Employment standards, while expressed in assessment criteria, are implemented through such realities as licensure, employment and reappointment, contract status, incentives and rewards (both programmatic and financial), assignments and promotions. These realities diminish the commitment to the formative/growth dimensions of any assessment system. One measure of the commitment to the formative/growth dimension is the degree of structure of the dispute resolution process related to assessment of performance.

Another measure of shared commitment to the formative aspects of TADS is the linkage with professionalization initiatives, including school-based management/shared decision-making programs, peer intervention and assistance programs, faculty council/shared decision-making cadres, and related joint collective bargaining professionalization issues.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Included among the refinements gleaned from ten years of TADS experience are the need for automating the system, avoidance of unnecessary instruments, strengthening of proficiency monitoring and attendant training, and focus on advanced pedagogy through incorporation of critical thinking dimensions.

TADS was constructed to assess "acceptable" teacher performance in the classroom; as such, it is considered a ground-level instrument. The spirit of professionalism makes assessment of merely acceptable performance at a base level unreasonable.

The TADS research base includes effective teaching research from the mid 1970's through 1981. Since that time effectiveness teaching research has made great strides in several areas which will be included in future assessment systems which measure more than adequate performance. This research addresses, in addition to critical thinking skills, questioning techniques, (including higher order questions), development of homework assignments to reinforce and promote instruction, expert teacher techniques, motivational activities, demonstration of warmth and friendliness, and cooperative learning. None of these is part of TADS.

Advanced pedagogical techniques are required for approval of an evaluation system by the state of Florida. Auxiliary teaching behaviors, either in the aggregate or in combination with required teaching behaviors, do not meet this requisite.

Refinements to TADS, therefore, must carry out the following:

1. assess performance above the minimum level of acceptability;
2. relate performance behaviors to the teaching of thinking skills and the use of higher order questions;
3. use current research and data on effective practices;
4. assess advanced pedagogical techniques.

In the state of Florida, assessment systems must also have a direct linkage with school improvement plans.

Support for these refinements is found in "Assessment of Educational Personnel in the Twenty-First Century," in which Tetenbaum and Mulkeen (1988) stress the need for an evaluation system to assess the primary goal of education in the twenty-first century: to educate students who can use a variety of thinking strategies for solving problems and exploring new ideas.

In "A New Generation of Classroom-Based Assessments of Teaching and Learning; Concepts, Issues and Controversies from Pilots of the Louisiana Star," Ellett and Garland (1987) report that the second generation of teacher assessment must focus on student learning, and that teacher performance is credited only if the teaching behavior has an effect on the learner. They emphasize the need for extensive teacher planning to include assessment materials that adequately reflect student attainment of

objectives, and stratified home learning assignments to enhance learning. Motivation for learning and providing students with the reason for a task are elements missing in TADS that are critical to the psychosocial learning environment.

Under a broader heading of "Professional Responsibilities," the contributions a teacher makes to a school's improvement plan are likely to be measured by criteria far beyond effective teaching behaviors identified in a classroom setting. In fact, some counties in Florida have begun piloting a usage of the more standard assessment systems for novice and annual contract teachers, with tenured/long-term teachers eligible to opt for a mutual identification of professional responsibilities contributions to the school improvement plans as a basis for performance assessment. This extends performance well beyond the classroom setting and recognizes and rewards contributions typically not measured. The diversity and variability of such contributions moves away from any "one size fits all" system, and compels a process which empowers individual improvement plans.

SUMMARY

Second generation assessment in the Dade County Public Schools is highly focused on process, intrinsically research-based, linked to school improvement, and inclusive of the relationship of both instructional and administrative skills.

The process of development continues to be a mutual involvement of both management and labor. Practitioner input draws from those standards identified through peer assessment and participatory management. The "government in the sunshine" mandate in Florida includes parents, business partners with education, and school advisory groups in the expanded experience of participatory management.

Research continues to be fundamental to assessment, but it has significantly exceeded the focus on classroom competencies, and includes such standards as The Personnel Evaluation Standards from The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. This enables a focus on the competency of the evaluation process itself relative to propriety, utility, feasibility, and accuracy. The availability of such research, in conjunction with the ten-year experience with TADS, broadens the second generation focus. School improvement, to the extent that it represents the best of individual competencies in conjunction with learning outcomes, must be the forum within which the confluence of both instructional and administrative contributions must be measured. That measurement profoundly involves the very parents, neighbors and citizens directly linked to the individual school.

The diversity of the student clients and the contributing educational professionals compels the utilization of multiple assessment systems not constricted by the convenience of service characteristics.

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